

Tatsuda Nature Park

Tatsuda Nature Park occupies the former site of Taishoji Temple.

The Hosokawa family had been assigned to Kokura, a domain in northern Kyushu, before Hosokawa Tadatoshi (1586–1641) was given the larger Kumamoto domain in 1632. The family temple in Kokura was called Taishoin, and Tadatoshi rebuilt it here in Kumamoto. His son Mitsunao later changed the name from Taishoin to Taishoji.

The park has four main mausoleums for the following individuals (from right left):

- Hosokawa Fujitaka (1534–1610), grandfather of Tadatoshi, father of Tadaoki
- Numata Jako (1544–1618), wife of Fujitaka
- Hosokawa Tadaoki (1563–1646), lord of Kokura, father of Tadatoshi
- Hosokawa Gracia (1563–1600), wife of Tadaoki

The mausoleum of Hosokawa Gracia is the most visited of the four. Gracia chose to die at the age of 37 rather than be taken hostage by military commander Ishida Mitsunari, who hoped to use her to force her husband to switch his allegiance from the Eastern Army to the Western Army in the runup to the Battle of Sekigahara in 1600. Ishida was defeated at Sekigahara, and in 1603 the Tokugawa shogunate was established, ruling Japan until 1867. Gracia's tragic life story has made her a popular character in historical fiction. Her birth name was Tama; Gracia is the baptismal name she took when she converted to Christianity.

The Family Crest as Design Element

The mausoleums consist of two parts: an open-sided worship hall (*haiden*) and a main sanctuary (*honden*). The doors of the sanctuaries are left open so it is possible to see the enormous five-ring stone pagodas, or *gorinto*, inside. The nine circles of the Hosokawa crest are carved into doors, walls, and even metal fittings, and there are rather fine *onigawara* (goblin tiles) at the corners of the roofs.

Among the other Hosokawa family graves is that of Hosokawa Narishige (1755–1835), the 10th-generation head of the clan. Narishige was adopted from a cadet branch of the Hosokawa family to keep the male line going when there was no natural-born son to inherit the family name. Some people believe that his grave is here rather than at

Kitaoka Nature Park with the graves of the rest of the family from the third generation onward because he was not part of the main branch of the Hosokawa family. Also here is the stone stupa dedicated to Miyamoto Musashi (1584–1645), the legendary swordsman who spent his twilight years in Kumamoto under the patronage of the Hosokawa family.

Tea at the Lake

Overlooking the lake is the Ko-sho-ken (Look-up-at-the-Pines Teahouse), which dates from 1922. With its thatched roof and shingled eaves, the building is based on designs by Hosokawa Tadaoki (1563–1646). Tadaoki was one of just seven disciples of Sen no Rikyu (1522–1591), the celebrated tea-ceremony master. The stone basin for handwashing (*chozubachi*) in the garden is said to have been used by Rikyu. Indeed, Tadaoki was so enamored of the basin that he took it with him whenever he traveled to Edo (Tokyo) to spend alternate years in the capital close to the shogun.

Nature lovers will enjoy the moss garden, dotted with old 30-meter-high cedars covered in epiphytes. There are occasional beds of Japanese double gardenia, a rare flower once thought to have been extinct. It only grows here on Mt. Tatsuda, and flowers in June and early July.